

Henrich, Joseph; Boyd, Robert; Bowles, Samuel; Camerer, Colin; Fehr, Ernst; Gintis, Herbert (eds.): Foundations of Human Sociality: Economic Experiments and Ethnographic Evidence from Fifteen Small-Scale Societies

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Rezension / review

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Sabbagh, C. (2008). Henrich, Joseph; Boyd, Robert; Bowles, Samuel; Camerer, Colin; Fehr, Ernst; Gintis, Herbert (eds.): Foundations of Human Sociality: Economic Experiments and Ethnographic Evidence from Fifteen Small-Scale Societies. [Review of the book *Foundations of Human Sociality: Economic Experiments and Ethnographic Evidence from Fifteen Small-Scale Societies*, by J. B. R. B. S. C. C. F. . E. G. H. (. Henrich)]. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 44(6), 1205-1208. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-65298>

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Joseph Henrich – Robert Boyd – Samuel Bowles – Colin Camerer – Ernst Fehr – Herbert Gintis (eds.): *Foundations of Human Sociality: Economic Experiments and Ethnographic Evidence from Fifteen Small-Scale Societies*
New York 2004: Oxford University Press, 472 pp.

Like the other volumes reviewed in this section, this book addresses one of the basic social science questions: What kind(s) of human motivation underlie social collaboration? *Foundations of Human Sociality* represents a far-reaching endeavour to challenge the notion of homo economicus, which has been the cement of many influential social, economic, and political theories, as well as game theory, rational choice theory, and social exchange theory. This notion entails a conception of human motivation whereby individuals are self-interested agents who strive to maximise their own utility from a given interaction, expecting others to do the same. In other words, they reveal a 'self-regarding' preference, or desire, to collaborate with others only if the collaboration maximises their own utility gains. Against this understanding, *Foundations of Human Sociality* suggests that self-regarding preferences cannot satisfactorily account for frequent instances of pro-social behaviour, guided by 'other regarding' (so-

cial) preferences. By means of a complex laboratory enterprise that included observation of behaviour in both experimental and everyday life conditions, the contributors specified two main goals for examination. First, they aim to refute the homo economicus notion by showing that, when considering collaboration with others, individuals across different societies are de facto also guided by social preferences, including strong reciprocity and fairness. Second, they aim to identify socio-cultural and economic conditions that shape self-interest and other kinds of social preferences.

The homo economicus notion is empirically refuted through an ambitious research programme conducted by a group of scholars from different social science disciplines, including economics, anthropology, psychology, and evolutionary biology. This research programme mainly leans on game theory, including variations of the Ultimatum Game, Public Goods Game and Dictator Game. As reviewed in Chapter 3 by Colin Camerer and Ernst Fehr, these games generally assume that, when trying to meet their goals and desires, individuals weigh different alternatives (options) and their consequences and maximise a preference function. However, the book's research makes a meaningful contribution by elaborating the following: First, it attempts to shed light on the issue of human motivation and social collaboration from an interdisciplinary perspective. By crossing age-old disciplinary divides, the authors attempt to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of relations between the individual and society. This understanding is achieved not only by integrating different disciplinary views but also by using different methodologies. Specifically, the chapters rely both on economic experiments and on ethnography. This last method, which views culture in a more holistic form, unveils socio-economic patterns of interaction in everyday life and was meant to ascertain to what ex-

tent they fit behavioural findings obtained by the 'artificial' laboratory conditions of experimental games.

Second, existent experimental games have mainly been conducted among homogenous populations of university students across industrial societies (see the review by Camerer [2003]). These studies, which have unveiled relatively similar findings broadly supportive of the self-interest axiom, are likely to be biased because they characterise the 'particular' behaviour of relatively high-status young populations in industrial societies. To overcome this limitation and ascertain the extent to which these findings can be generalised to other type of societies, *Foundations of Human Sociality* adopted a far reaching cross-cultural approach that included respondents across 15 non-Western and small-scale societies which varied along a wide range of economic and social conditions. For instance, foragers go on multi-week foraging (hunting) treks; horticulturalists rely on agriculture, cultivating small gardens in combination with fishing and gathering; and (agro)pastoralists rely on small-scale sedentary agriculture and herding. Some of these societies are now sedentary, while others are (semi)nomadic, moving frequently, staying a few days to a few months in a single location.

The book broadens our understanding of pro-sociality by proving that the dominant self-interest axiom does not describe a part of human nature that is determined by 'universal' psychological and genetic or evolutionary mechanisms. Rather, it is a socially learned trait determined by 'particular' economic and socio-cultural conditions. A similar claim was suggested earlier by Morton Deutsch [1985] in related studies of the justice motive and distribution preferences, which have been extensively examined from a cross-cultural social-psychological and sociological perspective (for a recent review see Sabbagh and Golden [2007]). Yet the cross-cultural scope of this

body of literature has been limited to different types of industrial societies. In contrast, the unique contribution of the current study lies in its attempt to move the focus of research related to motivation and social collaboration from industrial societies to 'truly' non-Western small-scale societies.

The book systematically shows violations of the self-regarding preference assumption, indicating that respondents in small-scale societies also care about fairness and reciprocity in ways that deviate from university student populations [Camerer 2003]. For instance, when examining the dynamics of the Ultimatum Game among responders in a rural foraging/horticulturalist villages in Papua New Guinea (Indonesia), David Tracer (Chapter 8) finds violations of the self-regarding preference that seem to correspond to daily life interactions in that region. In the Ultimatum Game, the 'proposer' (first player) is granted a sum of money and s/he can offer any portion it to a 'responder' (second person). The responder then has the opportunity to accept the offer (s/he then receives the amount offered and the proposer receives the remainder) or to reject it (neither player then receives anything). Responders in the Anguganak and Bogasip villages were willing to sacrifice their own gains by showing high rejection rates (33%) even to generous offers by the proposers (the mean offer was almost 41%). This finding was interpreted as an outcome of the values of generosity that players brought to the game from their daily life interactions. In these villages, a display of generosity by giving out unsolicited gifts (in the form of food, clothing, household goods, string bags, tools or money) is a valued form of interaction. Acceptance of a gift, however, binds the gift-giver and gift-acceptor in a reciprocal relation, whereby the acceptor is expected to repay the debt. In this understanding, unpaid debts or non-reciprocated gifts place acceptors in a subordi-

nate status. Hence, even large gifts are frequently refused if the receiver is not sure s/he will be able to reciprocate (see also Gintis et al.'s *Moral Sentiments and Material Interests*, reviewed in this section). This type of multidisciplinary approach enables the book not only to validate behavioural findings collected by different methods, but also to provide plausible sociological or anthropological interpretations for often seemingly unintelligible behaviour.

Moreover, findings revealed a large amount of cross-cultural group variation in distributional preferences, indicating that culture does seem to matter in shaping these preferences. This between-group variation in experimental play is not explained by means of individual-level attributes such as gender, age, education, and relative wealth, all of which were found to have no effect on either proposer offers or the responders' likelihood of rejecting an offer. Rather, group membership and key group-level attributes tied to the socio-economic structure of daily interaction, such as the pursuit of a livelihood and common governance, are found to play a more crucial role in determining these preferences. Two group-level dimensions of social and economic everyday interaction are found to structure pro-social behaviour. First, 'pay-offs to cooperation' refer to economic life that transcends immediate kin and is reflected in the presence and importance assigned to the collaboration with extra-familial institutions. The second group-level dimension, 'aggregated market integration', is composed of three different and interrelated aspects of daily socio-economic interactions: frequent engagement in market exchange, socio-political complexity or centralised extra-familial decision making, and settlement size. Higher levels of payoffs to cooperation and aggregated market integration in a given society are found to increase pro-social behaviour in experimental games, that is, the willingness to act beyond self-interest and

to enter cooperative exchanges in the form of fairness and reciprocity. Thus, this type of social preferences is likely to assist market exchange by ensuring proper behaviour by participants, as also suggested by Gintis et al.'s *Moral Sentiments and Material Interests*. This finding is applicable only when considering market exposure on the group level. But it is worth noting that several surveys have ascertained that individual-level variables do matter in this respect [e.g. Wegener and Liebig 1995]. Even though the book does not elaborate this issue further, it is important to provide a satisfactory interpretation given the influence of social structure on individual-level attributes (like being a woman or wealthy person). Future research should determine whether these findings are a result, for instance, of method artefact (use of experiments vs. survey) or the extent of variance on individual-level attributes across different types of societies (industrial vs. small-scale) (e.g. individual-level attributes in industrial societies are likely to be more heterogeneous than in small-scale societies).

To conclude, *Foundations of Human Sociality* implies a contextualised conception of human motivation, whereby individuals, when considering social collaboration, are not guided by generalised self-regarding or other-regarding (non-rational) preferences, but rather by preferences that are context-specific – structured by particular socio-cultural and economic conditions that vary both within and between societies. In doing so, this book moves beyond a relatively narrow and micro-level view of rational economic man emphasising universal human traits to a theory of institution-building that identifies social structure conditions that may foster human motivation and behaviour aimed at achieving collective objectives or common (public) goods on the basis of rules of fairness and reciprocity. This approach, in particular the Payoff of Contribution dimension, is remarkably consistent with Putnam's [1993]

social capital theory, which shows that social collaboration is built on social networks that underlie norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness. The development of these pro-social dispositions is in turn enabled in societies that further extra-familial ties and disregard or transcend purely 'amoral familist' interactions [Banfield 1958].

This research project nevertheless leaves several unresolved problems. First, there is the problem of causality, which derives from a major theoretical dilemma in the social sciences. To what extent are pro-social dispositions the result of structural constraints, such as market integration, or rather an active element in structuring these constraints [Giddens 1997]? Joseph Henrich (Chapter 2) discusses this problem on a theoretical level by explaining the different mechanisms through which the structure of interaction affects preferences. Yet only future longitudinal research will be able to empirically ascertain to what extent, and under which conditions, social structure shapes human motivation/preferences. Second, the book relies on the questionable idea that the any given individual is guided by a consistent and univalent body of motives. This entirely disregards the possibility that people weigh several (not necessarily consistent) motives at the same time and combine them in various ways in order to arrive at trade-offs in their distribution preferences, and that they do so differently in different situations. Future research should allow for the possibility of ambivalent motives and identify the conditions that give salience to different types of motives and trade-offs. The innovative use of the ethnographic (qualitative) methods in this book, which may unveil different sorts of motives that remain undetected by quantitative methods, should therefore be deepened in future studies. Finally, as suggested by Henrich, the book's findings stimulate an evolutionary puzzle to be more fully addressed in future work: Why do unselfish motives evolve in

the face of the evolutionary logic in which material advantages can be achieved by adopting self-interested preferences?

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Herbert Gintis – Samuel Bowles –
Robert Boyd – Ernst Fehr (eds.): *Moral
Sentiments and Material Interests.
The Foundations of Cooperation
in Economic Life*

Cambridge, Massachusetts 2005:
MIT Press, xii + 404 pp.

Imagine a situation in which you are a member of a group of four. Each member has a monetary endowment of €10. Your task is to decide how much of the money to contribute to a common group project, while you keep for yourself what you do not contribute. After everyone has made his decision, all contributions to the project